

Lake County News Sun, February 5, 2008

NORTH CHICAGO -- A recent infusion of new blood into the North Chicago Chamber of Commerce has that group intent on promoting economic development.

Chamber President Marvin Bemby, an executive with Abbott Laboratories, cited a "resurgence of interest in North Chicago by people inside and outside the city looking to move the city forward." During the inaugural Forecast North Chicago 2008, leaders talked about an economy on the upswing.

Mayor Leon Rockingham touted the redevelopment of the former "Strip" into the planned Sheridan Crossing Towne Center, the reopening of Gate 4 at Naval Station Great Lakes, and the anticipated \$13 million reconstruction of Martin Luther King Jr. Drive from Sheridan Road west to Green Bay Road.

Rockingham also said demolition of the run-down commercial and industrial strip, including the toppling of the old Fansteel smokestack, signaled "a new beginning for the city."

"No longer will you see boarded-up buildings and store fronts dominate our streets," Rockingham said. "Crime is going down, abandoned houses are going away, and that's because it's a new day in the city of North Chicago."

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, attended the event despite the death of his father early Monday morning.

Kirk announced the award of a \$245,000 federal grant to support the Sheridan Crossing revitalization effort.

He also said he is still working for an appropriation to reimburse the city for the \$1.5 million it contributed to construct a new railroad crossing at Sheridan Road and King Drive -- money that failed to come from the Navy.

Kirk highlighted accomplishments that he said are strengthening the city, the second-poorest municipality in the state. Last month, bipartisan legislation providing more than \$10 million for North Chicago schools in federal impact aid became law. Construction of the \$120 million James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, a combined VA and Navy hospital, will begin in summer. The Lovell building is expected to open in 2010.

Kirk, a U.S. Navy Reserve intelligence officer, has also supported \$545 million in improvements to Naval Station Great Lakes and Recruit Training Command, the Navy's boot camp. Improvements include new barracks, a truck inspection facility, drill hall and small marksmanship arms trainer. The Navy's new life-size ship-in-a-bottle and the \$82 million facility that floats the USS Trayer, is a "centerpiece project" ensuring high-level training and protection from those who argue that the Great Lakes installation is "old and cold" or "too far from salt water."

Seventy vehicles per hour are traveling through Gate 4, re-engineered and re-opened last May at a cost of \$5.5 million.

"We've made it so people don't have to go out to Gurnee, (we will have) restaurants and hotels and businesses right outside of base," Kirk said.

This article was edited to comply with Franking Commission guidelines.